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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

Friday, December 20, 1940

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

SUBJECT: "THE HOLIDAY DINNER." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics,
U. S. Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

Maybe it's just my imagination--but I seem to hear Santa's sleigh bells off in the distance. At any rate there are signs of Christmas in the air, and before you know it Christmas Day will be here.

It's the season for rejoicing and merry-making--the season to be happy and carefree, and that also goes for your Christmas dinner--even if you cook and serve it yourself. So today I'm bringing you some ideas from the Bureau of Home Economics of the United States Department of Agriculture--suggestions for making your Christmas dinner preparations run as smoothly as possible.

First of all--there's the matter of deciding on a bird to have for Christmas dinner. If the family is small, chicken is always a good choice. As for the size bird to buy, the poultry cooking specialists suggest that you allow about 1 pound of chicken (that's 1 pound, dressed weight) for each person to be served. So if there are 4 persons at dinner, you'll probably want at least a 5 pound chicken. That'll give you 4 generous servings, maybe with some left for sandwiches later.

A young duckling is another good choice for the small family. But duck doesn't go quite as far, so it's best to allow about a pound and a half for each person to be served. In other words, a 6 pound duck will come out just about even for a family of four.

Turkey is another traditional Christmas bird. It's reasonable in price this year and the meat goes a long way. Allow from three-quarters to one pound for a serving. But don't worry if there's meat left-over. Cold turkey in the refrigerator is

like money in the bank, when it comes to planning meals for the days to follow.

Another choice is roast goose. In many homes roast goose is as much a part of Christmas as the lighted tree and glowing candles. A goose will probably weigh around 10 to 12 pounds. And if you figure on a pound and a half for a serving--there'll be enough for 7 or 8 persons.

If you'd rather have meat for Christmas dinner--there's plenty of tradition to back you up. You might choose roast pork loin or shoulder--baked ham--roast beef--or even a thick broiled steak.

Now that the important point of choosing the meat is settled--let's go back to the first course. You don't need a first course for an informal family dinner--but it does add a touch of elegance. If you want to stimulate appetites, without detracting from "what is to come"--you might have tomato cocktail, fruit juice, cranberry cocktail, or a fruit cup. If you're both cook and hostess, it may be easier to serve the appetizer in the living room, and let some other member of the family take over--while you get the rest of the dinner on the table.

Christmas morning is a pretty busy time to be cooking a dinner--especially when the meal must come up to the best in the family's tradition of cooking and serving. If you're looking for short cuts, here are a few suggestions for getting some of the work done ahead of time. Cleaning the bird and pulling out the pin feathers is one of the slow, tedious jobs that you can easily get out of the way the day before. You can even have all the ingredients ready for your stuffing, so you can make it up in a jiffy. At least have your bread crumbs prepared and measured, have the celery chopped and stored in a cool place.

Put the stuffing in hot, and you'll shorten the cooking time for the bird. Of course, you can even stuff your bird the day before. But then be sure to have the stuffing cold when you put it in, and keep the bird cold overnight.

If the bird fills the oven, you'll have to choose vegetables that can be cooked on top of the stove. Remember that you need only one starchy vegetable--Irish potatoes or sweet potatoes or squash. Besides this you'll want a green vegetable--spinach or other greens, Brussels sprouts, broccoli, snap beans, or cabbage. And then if you want another vegetable--you'll find that carrots, onions, cauliflower, or turnips are easy to prepare.

Relishes and extras do much to dress up the holiday dinner. You can have cranberries made into sauce or relish ahead of time. And if you like the crispness of celery, have it washed and ready to put on the table. Your own homemade pickles and relishes will also make a nice extra touch.

For dessert, mince pie and plum pudding are both good choices. You can make the pudding weeks ahead of time, and then reheat it in the steamer. Or, you might make a mince pie the day before and reheat it in the oven after you take the bird out.

All in all, it takes good planning to make a good Christmas dinner. A written menu as a safety-first measure helps you to get the right balance of food values--harmony in the color scheme--contrast in texture of the vegetables--and none of those last minute scurries, because something was forgotten. A detailed work schedule helps to dovetail all the different preparations for a big meal. Clock-work at the last minute gets everything on the table at the same time--the hot things hot, and cold things cold.

Here's hoping that these suggestions will help to make your cooking as much fun as the rest of the holiday festivities.

